




# Kaputu Kaak Kaak Kaak!

A VERY  
SRI LANKAN  
STRUGGLE  
a guide for  
activist kids

AMAL DE CHICKERA + DESHAN TENNEKON  
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## ABOUT THE TITLE

“Kaputu Kaak Kaak Kaak” is one of the popular chants you will hear at Sri Lankan protest sites in 2022. ‘Kaputa’ or ‘crow’ is the nickname that has been given to a powerful and corrupt Sri Lankan politician. ‘Kaak Kaak Kaak’ is the sound that the crow makes. When you hear this chant, you will know that someone is protesting against powerful people who have harmed our country. This chant signifies our very Sri Lankan people’s struggle.





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For all who protested before us  
For all who will protest after

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First edition June 2022

I am A5 size. You can print or photocopy two of my pages on a regular  
A4 page. Please copy and share me for free.

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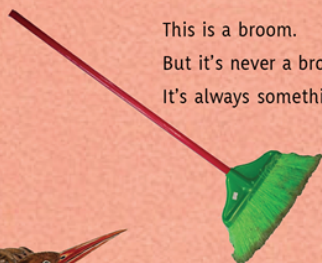


## The Cast

This character is greedy, powerful and hurts others. It may be a powerful politician; a dishonest religious leader; a violent group, soldier or policeperson; a selfish businessperson or even a large company. Who exactly it is changes from page to page. Once you learn to recognise this type of character, you will begin to recognise them everywhere.



This is a broom.  
But it's never a broom.  
It's always something else.



This is gold. But it's  
also other things that  
people are greedy for.



These characters  
are you and me  
and all of us.

# Hello!

I'm glad you picked me up.

It's great being a book. But I can never make the first move.

I need you to find me, get interested and open me.

Now we can be friends!

So...

Let's talk about what's going on in our country, Sri Lanka.

Do you remember a time, in the evenings, or holidays, when your family would look at each other and ask "What shall we do? Go to the beach? A park? Visit relatives?"

In 2022, many families are asking, "Shall we go for a protest?"

You may then make a poster and walk to a nearby protest. You may hold the poster, a candle, or your fists raised in the air. You may learn slogans and chant chants. Passers-by may cheer and toot their horns.

Some adults say children shouldn't protest. Others say they should. Some of your friends may go to protests every day. Others may have never been to one.

Either way, everyone's talking about the people's struggle.

As a young Sri Lankan citizen, you may want to get involved. Remember, no one's too small to make a difference. (Look at my size!)

You may also have questions. "What's happening? Why are we protesting? What can change?"

I'll try to answer your questions and help you think of new ones. Questions are always good. They help us learn, think about why we do things and find better ways to do them.

Once you read me, pass me onto another child who I can also make friends with.

But first, let's try and understand who we are and how we got here...

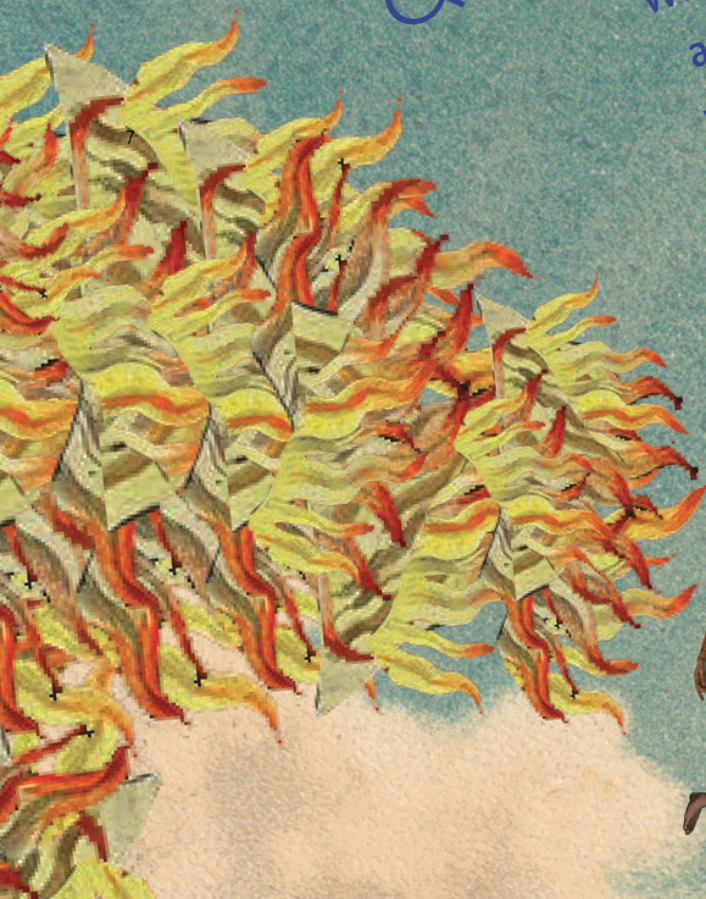






# Mind, Eyes & Ears

Who  
are  
we,  
and  
how  
did  
we  
get  
here?





# What makes a country?

Sri Lanka is our country.

But what makes a country a country, and what makes Sri Lanka ours?

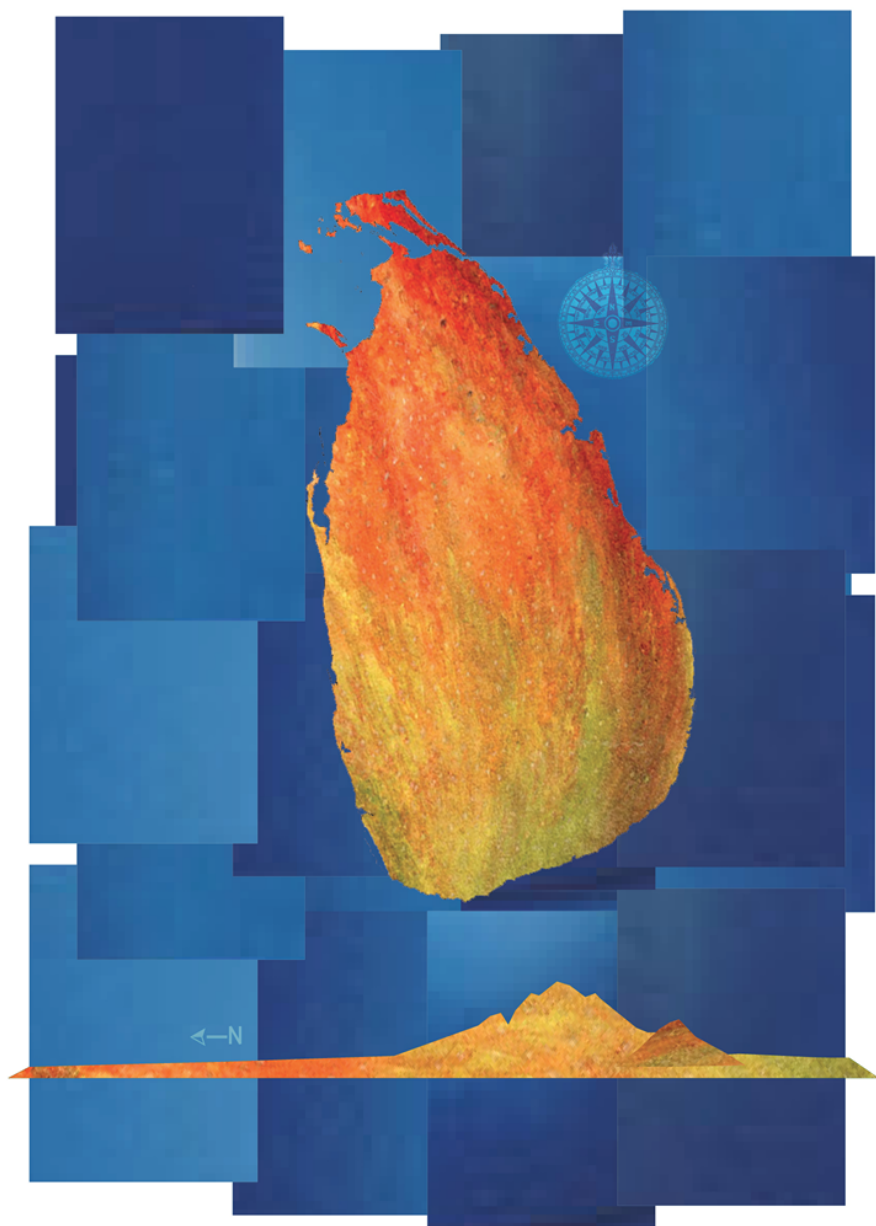
Our country is an island, surrounded by the sea.

Long ago, various people came to our island from near and far and made it their home. Different kingdoms existed side-by-side in peace, though sometimes they fought each other. In the year 1505 we were invaded by the Portuguese. Then we were invaded by the Dutch and finally the British. They were known as colonisers and ruled our land for almost 450 years.

In 1948, about 75 years back, our great-grandparents came together to demand independence from the British. We decided to run our country ourselves. The British called us 'Ceylon', but we later changed our name to 'Sri Lanka'.

And that's what makes a country – some land, people who feel they belong to it, a way of organising ourselves, and most importantly, the willingness to live together.

But just because people form a country does not mean they always know how to live together peacefully and treat each other kindly.



# Is it worth fighting for?

Sri Lanka is beautiful. We have beautiful mountains, beaches, rainforests, plains, rivers and waterfalls.

We have amazing wildlife: whales and dolphins in our seas; elephants and leopards in our forests; birds and butterflies in our skies.

We live amidst our colourful histories: ancient temples, kovils and mosques; ingeniously built irrigation networks, tanks and statues; colonial forts, churches and buildings. Together we have created fantastic art, music, dance, theatre and very yummy food.

Our people are beautiful too. Many are kind, generous, happy people who enjoy a good time. We are well known for our hospitality, which means we welcome and look after our guests with love.

There's a lot to be proud about our country. This is why it's so sad when we treat each other badly and make each other suffer.

This suffering and pain can destroy the beauty in our country and our people.

The people's struggle is against this suffering and pain that's harming our beautiful country. It's against the powerful people who make us suffer and get rich from it.

If we're fighting to protect our beauty, shouldn't we find beautiful ways to fight?





# Who are we?

Our identity is what makes us who we are.

We actually have many identities, which fit together to make each of us unique, (like different tiles which are put together to make a beautiful mosaic).

Being Sri Lankan is part of our identity. Our other identities include our ethnicity, religion, language and class.

Our ethnic identity is the community we were born into. We often talk about Tamils, Muslims, Burghers and Sinhalese. But Sri Lanka has over 24 ethnic groups. Can you name them?

Religion is an identity too. Sri Lanka has Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, followers of other faiths and those with no religion.

You may have friends or relatives with these different identities.

So many different identities mean lots of different clothing, food, traditions and languages. Isn't that great?

But some people treat these differences like they're bad. Some people are afraid of differences. They mock and look down on people who are different to them. People may learn to do this from their parents, teachers, communities, schoolbooks or TV.

It's time to question this. Don't you think?





# Where do we belong?

Community is a great word.

It describes a group of people who may live or work together, share similar values, are responsible for each other and feel like they belong together.

Our religious and ethnic groups can feel like communities. Our neighbourhoods, schools and sports teams are all communities of different sizes.

Sometimes a whole country can feel like a community. When this happens, it's a great thing. It means we're all looking out for each other.

Our communities are a big part of our identity.

Politicians have learnt that if they keep telling one community that it's more important than the others, people from this community would start treating people from other communities badly.

Politicians have also learnt that when different communities become suspicious and afraid of each other, people will stop paying attention to the bad things that politicians do and the mistakes they make.

This has happened a lot in Sri Lanka.

Shouldn't we be able to celebrate and embrace our communities without putting others down?





# Who destroyed mine?

We all have homes where we live with our families.

Home should be safe and happy. Sometimes it isn't, if we have a fight, or something bad happens to us or someone we love.

For some of us, home hasn't been happy or safe because it was destroyed by mobs, soldiers or terrorists.

Many Sri Lankans – mostly Tamils and Muslims in the North and East – lost their homes many times since we got independence, in particular, during our very long and violent war. The army is still using some of these homes and refusing to return them.

In 1983 there were terrible attacks on Tamil people and many homes were destroyed. In 2014 and 2018, there were riots against Muslims. People had to escape this violence. Some moved to other parts of the country. Others went abroad.

In Colombo, some politicians decided they would destroy small houses and build big buildings instead. Many poor people were forced out of their homes because of this.

You may have relatives or friends who had to flee their homes. Maybe you had to flee your own.

How would you feel if this happened to you or someone you know?







# Eppadi? Kohomada? How?

Our people speak three main languages – Tamil, Sinhala, English. We also use Sign Language.

Scientists say that if you speak more than one language, your brain develops better.

How many languages do you speak?

Which language do you dream in?

Soon after Independence, in 1956, our politicians made a rule that Sinhala was the most important language. Anyone who wanted to work for the people – even in places where people spoke only Tamil – had to learn Sinhala.

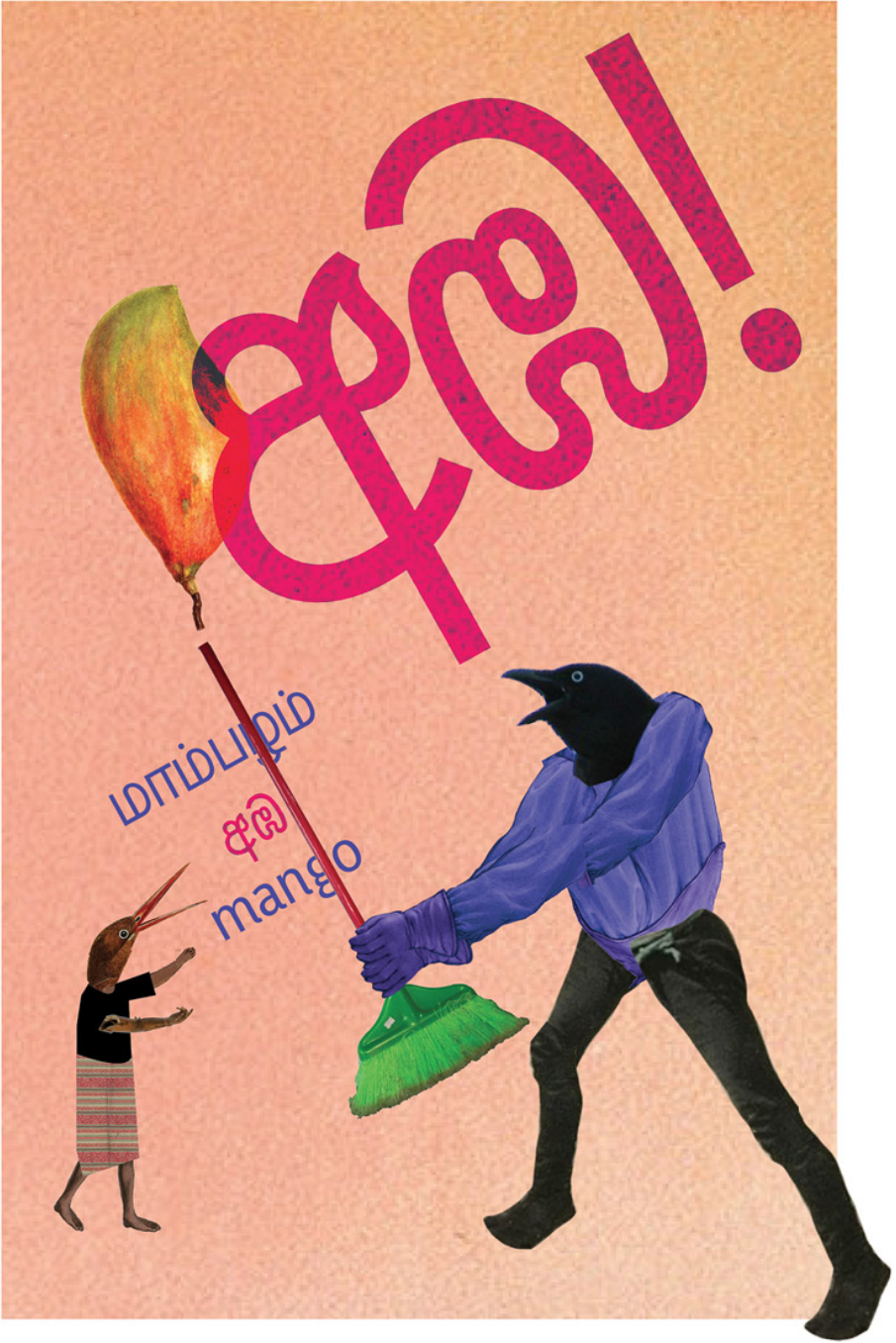
Because of this rule, many people who spoke Tamil or English were made to feel like they didn't belong. They were treated badly. Some people lost their jobs. Many left the country.

Children who used to study together in the same class or school, were divided into Tamil and Sinhala classes or schools.

Many years later, in 1987, this rule was changed. However, the damage had been done.

Our three languages are still not treated equally.

How would you feel if you couldn't get information, couldn't get things done or didn't feel safe speaking your language?





# What do you believe?

In Sri Lanka we practice many religions.

The four most widely observed ones are Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Some of us practice other religions or don't have any religion.

The same way our rules once said Sinhala was the most important language, they still say that Buddhism is the most special religion. This has created problems.

Some religious leaders have been less interested in following their own religion and more interested in becoming rich and powerful by putting other religions down.

Some of us have been killed because we followed our religion.

In 1987, a bus full of young Buddhist monks were killed by a group called the LTTE.

During the long war and even after it ended, the army destroyed many sacred Hindu places in the North and East.

Just three years ago in 2019, more than 250 children, women and men were killed in churches and hotels on Easter Sunday.

Our religion should make us better, kinder people. It does, for many of us. But so much bad has been done in the name of religion.

Shouldn't everyone be safe to follow their own belief?





# Should it matter?

It isn't easy to explain what 'class' is.

You now know that people in Sri Lanka are sometimes treated differently due to language, religion or ethnicity, right? Well, people are treated differently because of their class too.

One way to work out class is to ask if you're poor, rich or somewhere in-between. But money isn't the only way people measure class.

The type of work your parents do, the language you're most comfortable with, where you live and what type of work your ancestors did, (this is also known as your caste) can all be a part of your class.

Our community can be very 'hierarchical'.

This means, we treat some people as 'below' us and others as 'above' us. We don't treat people equally and seem to be unable to treat them fairly.

Many Sri Lankans waste a lot of energy thinking about these differences and treating people who we think are from a 'lower class', very badly.

Isn't that silly and hurtful?







# Treating difference differently?

Discrimination is when you're treated badly because of your identities or abilities.

When someone discriminates against you, they make up their mind about you, based on things that shouldn't really matter. It could be who your parents are, what you look like, what you believe in, your sex, or how much money you have. They then treat you poorly or unfairly because of this.

Unfortunately, there's a lot of discrimination in our country.

Muslims and Tamils; girls and women; poor people; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) people; people with disabilities.

Many of these people have experienced discrimination.

Sometimes, people are discriminated against because of several different identities they have. For example, if someone is a disabled, Tamil, Christian girl. This is called 'multiple discrimination'.

Think about your different identities. Who are your parents? What language do you speak? Who do you love? What do you believe? Who do you look like? Where do you live? What do you like doing?

How would you feel if you were treated badly because of these identities?





# Get up stand up!

A protest is when people demand change.

We can learn from those who protested before us. We owe a lot to them.

We protest to send a strong message to powerful people who ignore our needs. The message can be, “We don’t like what you’re doing”.

When bad things happen, some people just try to get on with their lives (or have no choice but to). Others fight for a better future for themselves and everyone else.

Some of Sri Lanka’s most powerful protests have been for equality. For language rights, community rights, women’s rights and LGBTQI rights.

Workers in factories and tea plantations have protested for better pay and fairer treatment.

People have protested to stop pollution, safeguard wildlife and preserve our jungles.

There have been protests by the families of people who have been killed or gone missing.

Through the power of protest, many bad things have been prevented and good things achieved. However, sometimes protests are ignored or protesters are attacked. When this happens, our problems often grow bigger.

Protesting is a great way to show how much we love our country.

Is there someone in your family who protests a lot?

கபுட்டு கெழுவ் Kaputu  
காக் காவ் Kaak  
காக் காவ் Kaak  
காக்! காவ்! Kaak!



# Who suffers most?

A terrorist is someone who uses violence and scares regular people to get what they want.

In our country, many people who peacefully protested against discrimination were ignored or attacked. Some groups then used violence to make themselves heard.

The LTTE used violence when politicians didn't listen to Tamil people's demands to be treated equally. A group called the JVP used violence when politicians ignored young people fighting the class system.

However, when violent groups say they speak for communities, it's often those very communities that suffer most. People who continue to peacefully struggle for their rights can be violently silenced by these groups. The LTTE killed many good Tamil leaders and activists.

Other communities also suffer. In 1990, the LTTE forced thousands of Muslims to leave their homes in Jaffna.

The word 'terrorism' comes from the word 'terror'. Can you think of the difference between terror and fear?

Now here's something that can be quite challenging to think about. Many politicians, the army and police also use violence against our people to get what they want.

What do you think that makes them?





# Can we reject it?

Sri Lanka has had a very violent history.

Many people have been killed by violence.

Tens-of-thousands of our people were killed, as the LTTE and army fought for more than 30 years in the long war. Many of these people were killed by LTTE bombs and attacks.

The war ended in 2009 in a horrifying way. As the army advanced against the LTTE, thousands of regular Tamil people were caught in the middle. Instead of protecting them, the army killed thousands of them.

Thousands were also killed in 1971 and 1989, when the JVP led young people to challenge our class system. Their struggle became violent and the army reacted violently.

Many journalists who tried to show what's wrong, good leaders who challenged bad leaders, and people who tried to protect our environment have also been silenced and killed.

Every act of violence leaves behind so much loss and pain and suffering.

We hope our country will one day learn to reject all violence.





# How do we decide?

Democracy is a way we organise ourselves, make rules and take decisions so we can all happily live together.

Because there are so many of us, we can't all be involved in making all the rules. Instead, adults choose people to take decisions on our behalf. These are our 'political representatives'.

Our 'representatives' must 'represent' us. They must make rules that benefit us and are fair to everyone.

Every few years, the people who want to represent us, tell us how they will make things better if we choose them. Adults listen to them and choose the ones they think are best. This is called an 'election'.

Democracy is very hard work.

We must think deeply before we choose our representatives. After we choose them, we must continue to watch them, and make them aware that we are watching them. If they let us down, we must not choose them again.

We have become lazy with our democracy. It's easy to select the same representatives and then stop paying attention to what they do. Our representatives have found easy ways to stay in power and use their power selfishly.

This is one of the main problems we must fix.



# Can we lead ourselves?

We've got used to calling our political representatives our 'leaders'.

Perhaps this is a mistake.

We made them think they're better than us. That they deserve special treatment and are above the rules.

They've turned us against each other, treated us poorly, broken their promises and told many lies.

The worst ones have stolen from us and even killed some of us.

The main representative of our people is the president. Our president has lots of power. Too much power, which he can use to do terrible things. A lot of people say we don't need a president, that having a president only makes things worse.

Our current president is Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Most of the protests are against him and his family. You'll see why as you read on.

We need different kinds of leaders. Leaders from among us, who understand what is important to us. Leaders who will listen, who care, are kind, brave and love our country. Leaders who will bring us together.

What other qualities do you think a leader should have?





# When powerful people cheat

Corruption is when powerful people use their power to do wrong things that hurt us, so they can become richer and more powerful.

Imagine your teacher stole your lunch and ate it every day. Now imagine you complained to the principal, but you were the one who was punished?

You'd be right to think that both your teacher and principal were being corrupt. Because both of them are more powerful than you and are helping each other to hurt you.

If nothing is done to stop this, it's possible that most of your teachers will begin to behave like this, robbing from children and then punishing them.

Soon, your teachers will be so used to stealing that they may even forget that it's wrong. All you students will be hungry and hate coming to school.

What if I tell you that this has been happening to our country for many years? Our politicians have been corrupt for a long time. Their corruption has only gotten worse.

They've stolen a lot of money from us and you. They're also stealing from your future kids' kids' kids, who aren't even born yet.





# “Do you know who my father is?!”

Nepotism is a type of corruption.

Nepotism is when people in power give important jobs to their family and friends rather than to people who can actually do the job.

Our president Gotabaya Rajapaksa's brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa was the prime minister until the 9th of May 2022. Mahinda was president before, and it was he who first gave Gotabaya a powerful job. Their brothers Basil and Chamal, Mahinda's son Namal, and many other family members also hold powerful positions.

Our country has a long history of nepotism. The Rajapaksas aren't the only ones.

When there is nepotism, a country is run like a secret club. The most important jobs don't go to the best people. Instead, they go to the people with the best connections. These people make bad decisions because they don't know what they are doing, and because they're corrupt. They get richer and more powerful, and the whole country pays the price.

The more this happens, the longer this happens, the worse things get.

Now, so many things have gone wrong, our people are struggling to live.



# How do we protect it?

The land of this little island is very special.

It gives us everything we need.

We must share our land with each other and with nature. If we harm it, we also harm ourselves.

Many powerful countries and companies are interested in our land. Sadly, we (and our politicians) have made bad and selfish choices about our land. We have harmed it or given it to others who have harmed it. Our animals, trees and people have suffered because of this.

A few years ago, in 2013, people from a town called Rathupaswala found that their water had been polluted by a nearby factory. They protested, but the army came and shot at the protesters and killed three people.

Even today, in 2022, no one has been held responsible for these killings.

Last year, in 2021, a big ship called the X-Press Pearl that was carrying dangerous chemicals and plastics caught fire near our beach and burned for 12 days. This environmental disaster caused great harm to our land, sea animals and people.

What do you think life will be like when you're grown up, if we don't take better care of our land now?





A virus is made of tiny too-small-to-see things that make people, animals and plants sick. Viruses can spread fast from one person to another. When a virus spreads around the world, it's called a pandemic.

COVID-19 is the worst global pandemic in over 100 years. All countries were affected by it and have tried different things to protect their people. Some countries said no one can enter or leave. Others told people to stay home. Some tried to live as normal. Most tried a mix of things.

COVID-19 affected Sri Lanka badly. You and other school children suffered a lot. How long was your school closed for?

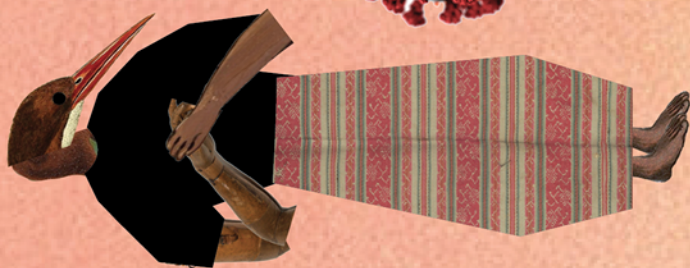
Because of COVID-19, many Sri Lankans working abroad lost their jobs and couldn't send money back to their families. COVID-19 also affected jobs in Sri Lanka. Fewer tourists came and spent their money here. For all these reasons, our country became poorer.

Our politicians even found ways to use COVID-19 to discriminate. Muslims, who bury their dead, were forced to cremate (burn) the bodies of family members who died due to COVID-19.

This created unnecessary sadness at a very difficult time.









# Where's it all gone?

People need money to buy things.

We earn money by working. We then decide how to spend our money. We can't always have what we want and must make choices. This is called 'budgeting'.

If we need to spend a lot of money – to build a house or buy a car – we may borrow from a bank. We must slowly pay the bank back. This is called 'taking a loan'.

Countries also need money. Citizens give some of their money for the country to spend on things we need, like schools, roads and hospitals. This is called 'taxation'.

Countries must also budget, save and borrow money from other countries or wealthy companies.

Sri Lanka has a money problem.



Because we don't produce everything we need, we must use foreign money to buy things from abroad.



Because of COVID-19, we had less foreign money coming into our country.



Because of corruption, lots of our money was stolen.



Because of bad budgeting, we spent on the wrong things (we spent thrice as much on the army as on schools).



Because of bad decisions, we took more loans than we can repay, and reduced taxation.

Now we don't have enough money.





# Who's in the gas queue?

We need fuel – petrol, diesel, kerosene, gas – for vehicles, electricity and to cook.

Sri Lanka doesn't have these types of fuel. We must buy them from other countries. Without foreign money, we can't do so.

In 2021, gas cylinders which people use for cooking, started exploding. Many people were hurt and homes were damaged because of this. We later found out that gas companies had changed how gas was mixed, to save money.

In 2022, we don't have enough fuel for vehicles or electricity. This is why there are power cuts and long queues at petrol stations. Some people have died, just queueing for fuel.

When there is less of something, but more people want it, it becomes very expensive. This has happened to our fuel. And when fuel becomes more expensive, everything else becomes more expensive. This is because we use fuel to power our machines and factories, to make electricity and run vehicles that transport things.

And so, our money problem has become a fuel problem, which is also making the money problem worse.

This is called a 'vicious cycle'.







# What went wrong?

Many of our people are farmers.

Farmers grow things in the soil for us to eat – rice, vegetables and fruit. Our soil was once very ‘fertile’. This means, it was full of nourishment for plants.

However, if you grow things over and over in the same soil, it becomes less fertile. It’s like if you bounce a ball on the same patch of grass every day. Over time, the grass will stop growing, get brown and die.

When this happens to soil, farmers use a thing called ‘fertiliser’ to increase nourishment for plants. But too much fertiliser is bad for us and the environment, particularly if there are many dangerous chemicals in it.

This problem should have been fixed, by speaking with those who know best – farmers who grow things and scientists who study chemicals.

Without speaking to any of them, the president said no one could use fertiliser anymore. The farmers were not prepared for this, and many lost their crops and money. We have less homegrown food because of this.

This is one example of bad leadership resulting in poor decisions.





# Why are we hungry?

Food is fuel for humans.

People can survive without lots of things, but we can't survive for long without food.

There should always be enough food for everyone. But because of bad decisions in the past, buying food from other countries has actually become cheaper than growing our own food.

Now that we don't have enough money to buy food from abroad, food has suddenly become very expensive.

Many families are having to take difficult decisions: to skip meals, stop eating certain types of food, and even beg for food.

Many people are helping others who don't have food. Some parents are doing three or four jobs to earn enough money to feed their children. But the problem is getting worse every day.

When children don't get enough nutritious food, it can affect their ability to grow, develop and learn.

When people are hungry, when there are no jobs, when politicians aren't giving them any solutions, they get desperate.

This is so very sad. It didn't have to be like this.



# 'What crisis?'

A 'crisis' is when problems get really bad.

Sometimes a crisis is created when lots of problems come together to make even bigger problems. When you're in the middle of a crisis, it can sometimes feel like there is no solution.

Everything we have talked about shows that our country is now facing one of its biggest crises ever.

Our people have been discriminated against and treated with violence, our leaders have stolen from us and made bad decisions, we are running out of money, fuel costs too much, people are going hungry, and some have even died.

In times of crisis, we have to come together and act wisely, to find the best way forward.

But still, the politicians are acting like there isn't a problem, or it isn't their fault. They are refusing to take responsibility.

This is why our people are desperate and protesting.





# Heart, Gut & Lungs

What  
are  
we  
doing  
about  
it?





கபுட்டு கெழுவு Kaputu  
காக் கைக் Kaak  
காக் கைக் Kaak  
காக்! கைக்! Kaak!





# Finding our power!

We're all citizens of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka is ours and we're Sri Lanka's.

We must work together to make our country better for us all.

For too long, we've been happy to elect our representatives, and leave the country in their hands. This is why we are now in a crisis.

Our politicians are to blame.

But we're also to blame.

While things have been bad in the past, it is only 'some' people who have been affected (Remember discrimination?).

When 'some' people are treated badly, unless 'all' people protest, things will rarely change.

This time, the crisis is so bad, everyone is affected.

For the first time, it feels like most of us are demanding change. But we must remember, for some of us, it is easier and less dangerous to protest. We are protected by our ethnicity, language and class. This is called 'privilege'.

We must look out for each other. Those of us who are privileged, must use our privilege well.

This is how we can as citizens, make a change together.





# Coming together!

There've been other struggles before. But this time, it feels different.

For the first time, it feels like all we're all talking about our rights, are angry with politicians, and demanding change.

Many of us are also talking about the deep problems in our country, and how people are treated badly because of their identities. We're trying to unite.

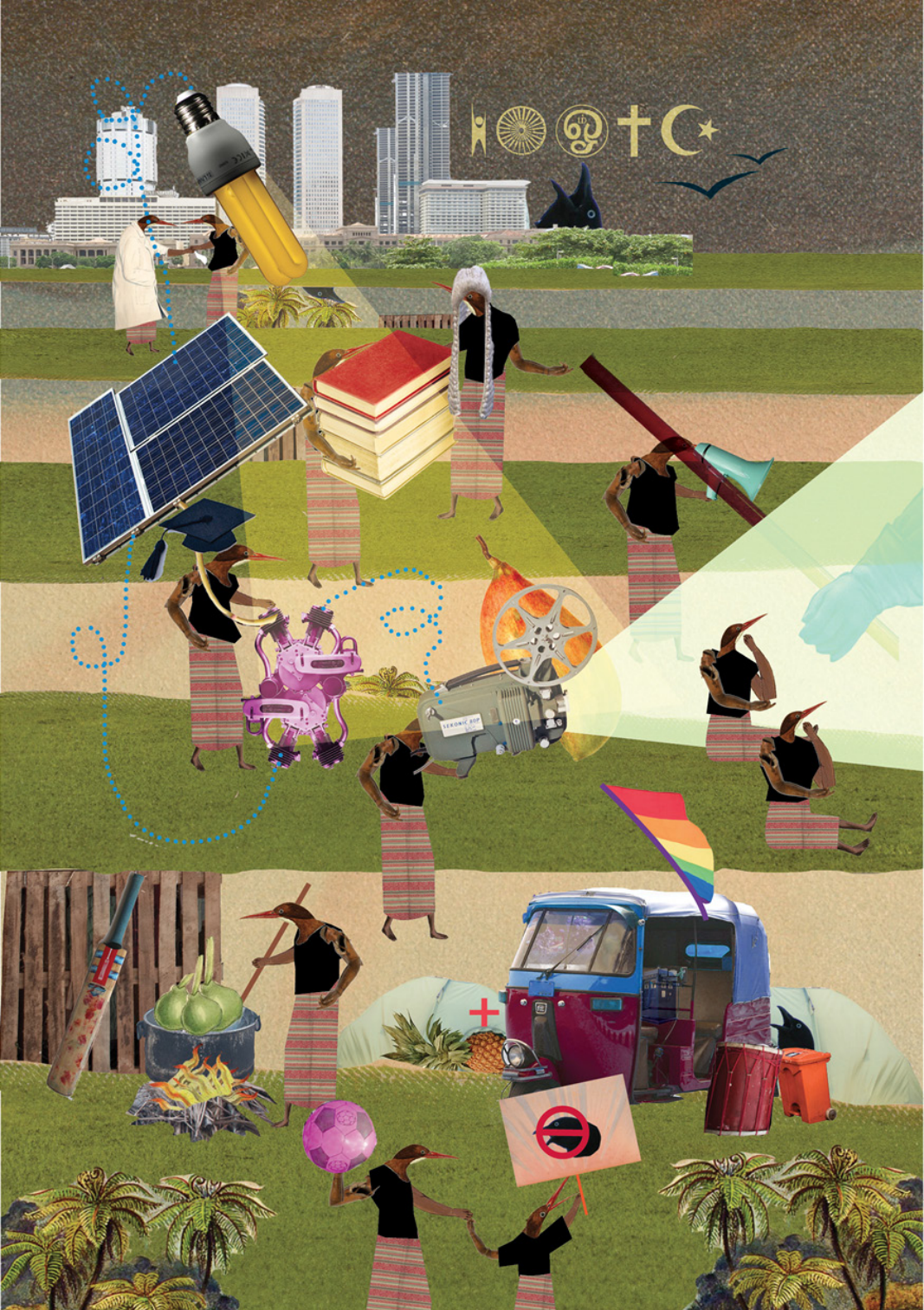
Many young people are leading this conversation. They don't have 'baggage'. This means, they can see more clearly because they were not part of the previous generations that made very bad mistakes.

They can say, "It's really wrong to treat Tamils, Muslims, LGBTQI people and others the way they have been". They can say, "We must be better".

The main struggle site is on Galle-Face-Green, Colombo. Protesters have renamed it GotaGoGama, after the main demand for president Gotabaya to go. But the struggle is happening all around the country. Protesters are shouting demands, showing posters, singing songs, doing theatre, giving speeches and making themselves heard.

Through our people's struggle, we're using public spaces together as citizens. We're showing those in power, that this is our country.





# We all have them!

Having 'rights' means we must all be treated fairly, be free to follow our dreams and have the basic things we need to live our lives.

All people have rights. We have these rights because we're human. We are born with our rights, and countries must protect them.

We all have the right to:



Importantly, we all have the right to protest.

Many of us are now exercising this right.

This is why, when the president said he was "allowing the protests to go on", he was wrong.

We don't need his permission.





கபட்டு கபட்டு Kaputu  
காக் காக் Kaak  
காக் காக் Kaak  
காக் காக் Kaak!



# What do we want?

The people's struggle is making many demands for change.

But what are they?

One of the main demands is for the president and his family to leave their jobs.

Along with this are various other demands:



For politicians to return the money they've stolen.

For better representatives – people who are honest and kind.

For bad rules to be changed (for example: we don't ever want a president again).

As more people have joined the protests, as our voices have become stronger and louder, many other demands are also being made. Some are old demands that were ignored for too long. Others are new. These old and new demands include:



Justice for those killed, or who went missing during and after the war.

Justice for journalists and activists who were punished, attacked or killed.

Getting rid of a set of rules called the 'Prevention of Terrorism Act', which allows police to imprison people for ages, even if they haven't committed a crime.



Making food, fuel and living more affordable.

Think about what your parents and neighbours are talking about and demanding.

If you could make any demand, what would it be?



# Showing we care

Solidarity means coming together to show we care for and support each-other.

Do you remember we talked about how we haven't always done this in the past? How some of us didn't care when others were discriminated against?

One important step of showing solidarity, is to say sorry. We must say sorry for things we did. We must also say sorry for things we didn't do enough to prevent.

This isn't always easy, especially because many of us are so upset and let down by what happened before.

Imagine if everyday a bully hit you, but none of your friends said anything. Then one day, the bully hit your friends too, and they all acted very surprised and upset. How would that make you feel?

Many of us now realise that being silent when others were being hurt, has only made things worse.

People are beginning to say sorry for these mistakes. People are beginning to show solidarity with those who are different to them.

This is making our people's struggle very powerful. It shows that we can be the change our country needs.





# What they tried

Powerful people don't want to change the way things are.

This is because they have made things work for them.

When people started protesting, politicians laughed and said it would fizzle out. But we only protested more.

Powerful people then tried to beat up and arrest the protestors. But lawyers fought to keep them safe.

They then announced a curfew – they said no one was allowed onto the streets. But we got onto the streets anyway.

They then tried to ban social media. But people used a technology called VPNs to access social media.

The powerful people then announced a long holiday thinking protestors would go home. But protestors set up GotaGoGama and camped outside the president's office instead.

They then tried their old trick - to turn Sinhalese against Muslims and Tamils. But this time, we weren't fooled.

They even tried to block roads to prevent protesters marching. But even more protesters joined in.

The protestors have been teargassed, water-cannoned and shot at.

Whatever the politicians did, our people's struggle only kept getting stronger.





# Violence won't win

When our people's struggle kept getting stronger, powerful politicians did something even uglier than before.

On the 9th of May 2022, the prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa brought busloads of his supporters to 'Temple Trees' – the official house of the prime minister in Colombo. They were an angry mob, who were provoked to attack the protesters.

The mob first attacked some protestors outside Temple Trees. It then marched to GotaGoGama. The police did not protect the peaceful protesters at GotaGoGama. Instead, they watched, as this mob attacked and burnt the place and beat protesters up.

When news of this attack spread, many people in Colombo came to GotaGoGama to support the people's struggle. They were so very angry, some of them also got violent. They beat up members of the mob, attacked their buses, and even threw some of them into the lake. Later some powerful people's houses were also attacked.

The people had had enough.

Because things got so bad, Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned as prime minister. But Gotabaya Rajapaksa refused to resign as president.

Peaceful protesters have asked the people to stop being violent and have rebuilt GotaGoGama.

Violence is never the answer.







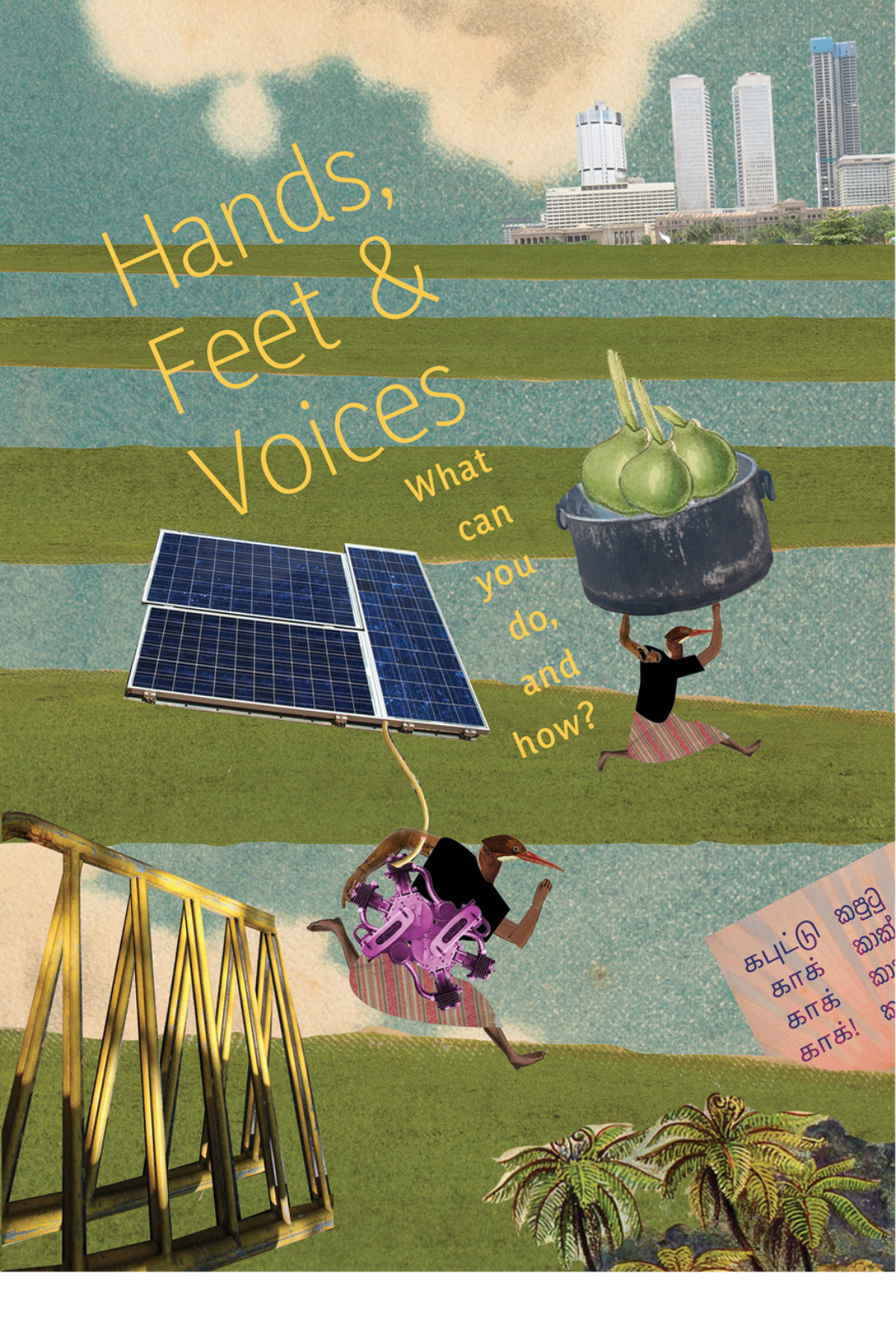
Kaputu  
Kaak  
Kaak  
Kaak!





# Hands, Feet & Voices

What  
can  
you  
do,  
and  
how?



கயட்டு  
காக்  
காக்  
காக்!

ஐயு  
வை  
வை  
வை

# Using our heads

Thinking makes us better citizens.

It's important to ask questions, speak to people, listen to different opinions and then make up our minds.

You shouldn't protest just because everyone else is.

You shouldn't not protest just because no one else is.

Some of the most important protests in the world started with one child. Have you heard of Greta Thunberg and the school strike for climate? Do you know how she started this protest against climate change?

To be an active citizen, you must think, decide what is important to you, and do what you can to make a change.

You can start by asking:



- Do I like what's happening to our country?
- What should we change?
- How can I show solidarity with people who've been treated badly?
- What's my main message?
- How can I safely share this message?
- Who can I join to make a bigger noise together?

And remember, we don't need to have the solutions before we protest. But we should keep thinking about what these solutions could be.







# Beautiful ways to fight

Being creative is always fun and exciting!

When you're creative, you use your imagination and talents to find new and powerful ways to share your message.

Once you decide your main message, you must think about the best way to share it.

Being creative doesn't mean using lots of expensive stuff. Often, the less you have, the more creative you have to be.

The people's struggle has been so creative! The posters, chants, songs, sculptures, paintings, costumes, memes, puppets and performances have been incredible.

When we're creative, we can make people laugh, sad or angry. But most importantly, we must catch their attention and make them think.

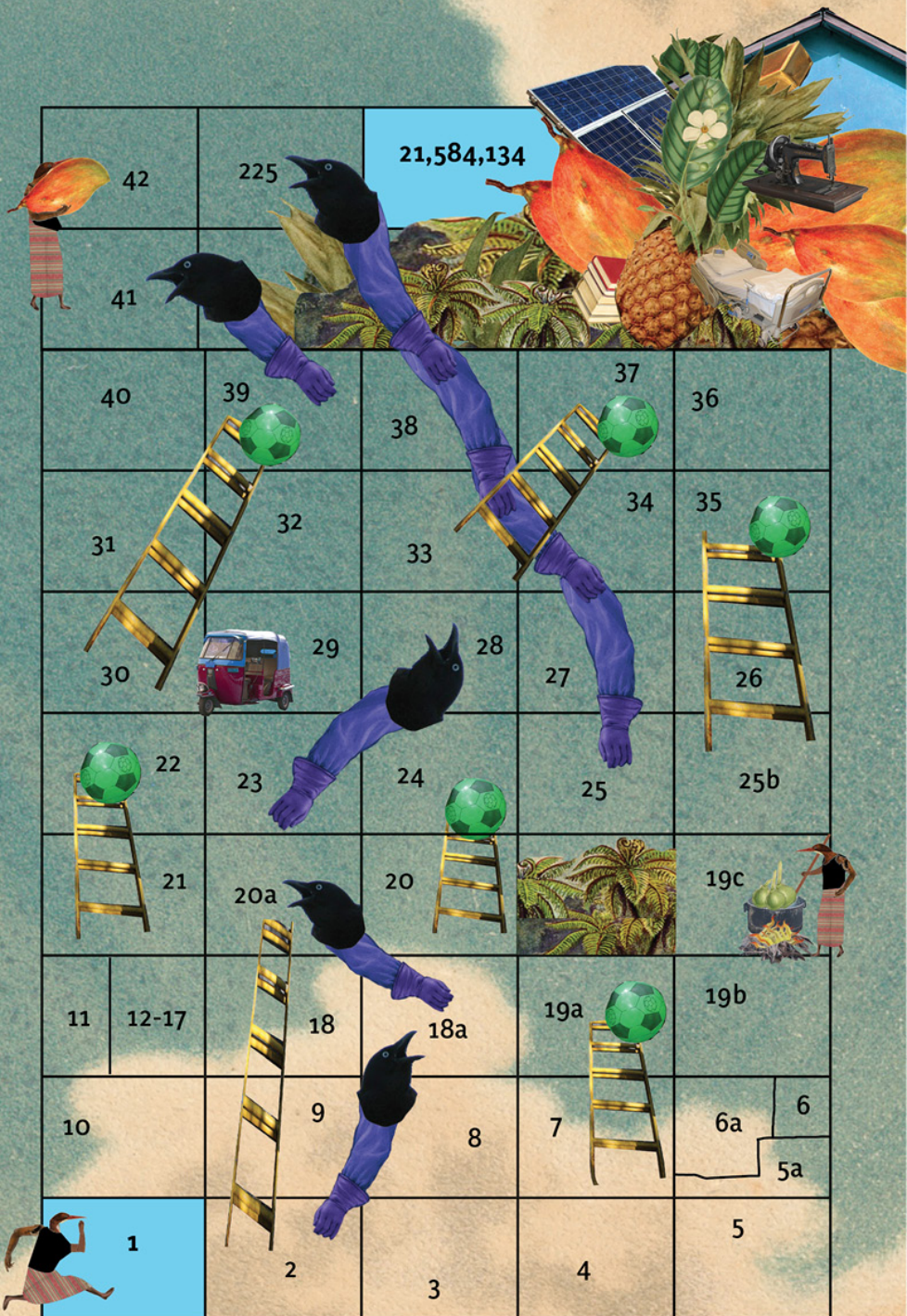
Why not make a poster? Think about the pictures, slogans or rhymes you can use. Try different things. Make them:



See if you can make a message that combines two of these.

Use lots of colours. Draw pictures.

Make it short and snappy!



HAVE FUN

# A song and a dance

Protesting doesn't have to be boring.

These are very difficult times and we're serious about change. But we can also have fun.

Some people say protestors shouldn't sing, dance, or have fun.

They're wrong.

Our culture is full of songs and art from protests. When things get really difficult, we sing, dance and share. When we do this, we make stronger connections with each other and build solidarity.

Best of all, if we're having fun, if we can laugh at people in power, they lose a lot of the power they have over us.

We sometimes build politicians up in our minds, we get scared of them, and think they're bigger, stronger, better and more powerful than they really are.

When we laugh, we see that they're scared of us.

That's why they hide behind barricades and have soldiers around them. This is why they still try to play their old games to make us hate each other.

So, remember to have fun.

Isn't it powerful, that being happy, free and unafraid can be the strongest act of protest?







கபட்டு	කපුටු	Kaputu
காக்	කෘක්	Kaak
காக்	කෘක්	Kaak
காக்!	කෘක්!	Kaak!

# Let's grow our ideas

The best ideas grow when we share them.

Can you find creative ways to share your message?

You can ask your grownups to safely post it on social media or make copies of your artwork.

Many other people are also sharing materials, giving talks, doing workshops and plays.

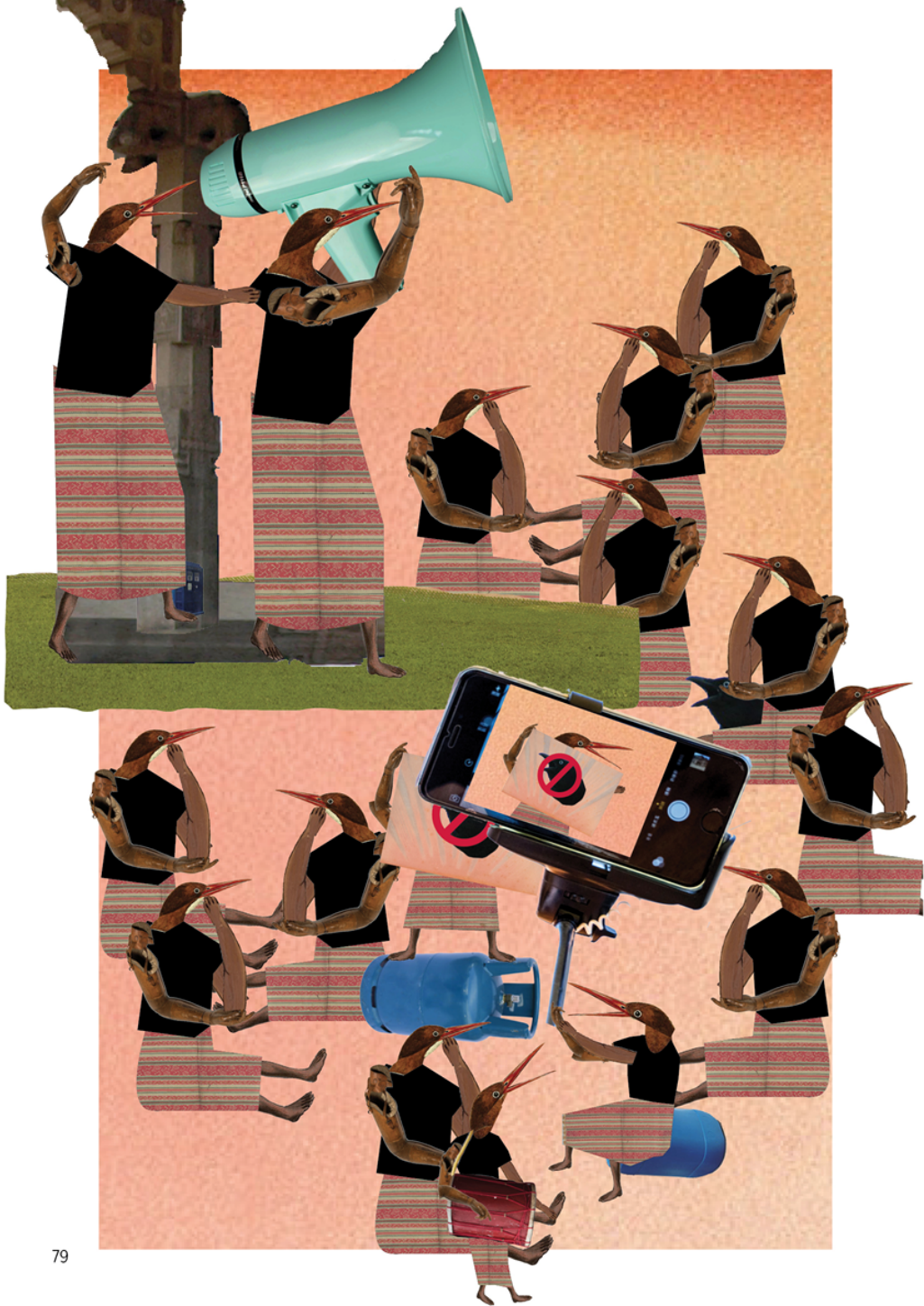
You can learn from them. You can also speak to people. Ask them why they're protesting, what their main demand is, who they're showing solidarity with.

This is an opportunity for us all to share and learn. Not from our teachers and textbooks. But from people all around the country, who have different experiences and know so many different things.

This is a very special moment in our history. We don't know how it will end, but we do know that it'll change the way we do things.

So try to keep a record of what you do and see. This way, we can all contribute to how our own history is told.

A people's history of a people's struggle.





# Share the mango

Protesting is hard work. It can be scary, and scarier for some than others. You will see protesters who are tired and hungry, sad and angry, and need some support.

When we are kind to each other, we show solidarity. Our community gets stronger. Our little acts of kindness all add up.

Maybe you could share some food with another child, or a smile, or compliment them on their poster.

We can be kind in different ways:



If we see wrong being done to someone, be kind, and try to help.



Help people to talk and protest about the things that they worry about most. We all must feel included and valued.



Remember that it may be difficult or dangerous for some people to protest. Find ways to include them too.

If we aren't kind to each other, who else will be?



# Protect ourselves

If you're out protesting, you must know how to be safe.

Protests can be crowded and busy. Always be with your grownup. Hold hands in crowded spaces. Have a plan of what to do if you get separated. If you're in GotaGoGama for example, you can agree to go to the Library or the Red Cross tent, if this happens.

Sometimes, protests can become dangerous. A dangerous protest is no place for children.

Our protesters have been peaceful. But the police or army may shoot water-cannons or teargas. They may charge protesters. If you think this might happen, you must leave.

If this happens suddenly, you and your grownups should leave immediately. Many other protestors will also protect you. That's how important you are to us all.

You must also be safe online. Your grownups may not want to share pictures of your face on social media. You can still share your message by asking them to post a picture of your sign.

When it comes to safety, always listen to your grownup. And always listen to yourself. Don't do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.





# Goodbye

What a great time we've had together!

You probably have many new questions now. Maybe you can try to find some answers by reading other books and speaking with other people.

You may also be feeling sad, worried or angry about what's happening. When so many of us are suffering because of the corruption and bad leadership of a few powerful people, it can feel overwhelming and unfair.

If you're feeling any of these things, please speak to the people you love. It's always important to talk about our feelings.

None of the crises Sri Lanka is facing were caused by you or other children. It's very unfair that you have to suffer through them.

This is why so many of us are coming together in our people's struggle to try and make things better. To change the way we do things as a country.

If you want to support the people's struggle, there are many different ways you can do this. Think and find the safest, best, most creative way for you.

I hope you enjoyed my company as much as I enjoyed yours. Please give me to another child so I can make friends with them too. If you want, you can even ask your grownups to make copies of me to share with others.

Let me leave you with one final thought. We've spoken a lot about powerful individuals who've harmed us and our country. But when the people come together, we're more powerful than all of them. This is why our people's struggle is so important.

Together we can make our country a safer, kinder, fairer, happier and more equal place for us all.

And together, we will!





Kitāb al-ʿajāʾib al-Makhlūqāt, Isfahān, 1921. Princeton University Library. No known restrictions. <https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/persian-demons-from-a-book-of-magic-and-astrology-1921>

## Backgrounds

Pechuel-Loesche, Eduard: Kießling, Johannes: Untersuchungen über Dämmerungserscheinungen: zur Erklärung der nach dem Krakatau-Ausbruch beobachteten atmosphärisch-optischen Störung. Hamburg und Leipzig: Verlag von Leopold Voss, 1888. ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, Rar 29145, <https://www.e-rara.ch/zut/doi/10.3931/e-rara-56381> / Public Domain Mark.

## Barrel: blue

<https://search.openverse.engineering/image/79b2d14a-398c-470c-a060-23247af8a5d3>  
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## Barricades

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## Black trousers

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## Brain cells

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Licence: Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) Credit: Neuronal migration is an artwork depicting many very young neurons that have been produced in the neuroepithelium migrating to their appropriate destinations in the brain. This image highlights the future of neuroscience showing different classes of cells colour coded. There is no available technique to do this now, but it is not far off considering the advances that have been made with brainbow mice. The brainbow technique allows for different cell types to be tagged with fluorescent proteins to track their development and connections with other cells. Prof. Bill Harris.

## Broom

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## Buddhism: Dharmachakraya

<https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/notes-coins/notes-and-coins/commemorative-coins-and-notes>

## Cloud poison

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## Compass

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NYPL catalog ID (9-number): b15262620 Unique Identifier (UUID): e06fecb0-c53c-012f-a0a4-58d385a7bc34. The copyright and related rights status of this item has been reviewed by The New York Public Library, but we were unable to make a conclusive determination as to the copyright status of the item. You are free to use this Item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use.

## COVID-19

<https://www.cdc.gov/media/subtopic/images.htm>  
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## Cricket bat

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## Cross

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## Crow body (purple shirt)

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/vexvy3g3>  
Credit: A physician wearing a 17th century plague preventive. Wellcome Collection. Public Domain Mark.

## Crow photo

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## Doctor's coat

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## Engine

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## Film projector

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## Fire

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## Galle Face Green

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## Gas cylinder

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## Gold bars

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"File:Gold bullion bars.jpg" by Stevebidmead is marked with CC0 1.0.

## Graduation: hat

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"File:Graduation-1449488 1920.jpg" by Wokandapix is marked with CC0 1.0.

## Grey roof house

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## Haekel

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## Hose

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## Hospital bed

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## Humanism

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## Independence Square

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## Inflatable toy

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## Islam: crescent and star

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## Leaf with white flower

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## Legs

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## Lightbulb

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## Lotus

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## Mango

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"Mangoes (Mangifera Indica) (1908) by Amanda Almira Newton. Original from U.S. Department of Agriculture Pomological Watercolor Collection. Rare and Special Collections, National Agricultural Library. Digitally enhanced.

## Megaphone

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## Microphone

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## Paintbrush

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## Petrol can: blue

<https://www.pngwing.com/en/free-png-ylllw>  
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## Petrol can: yellow

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## Phone camera

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"iphone camera in chinese selfie stick-france2015-em10=70-300mm-20150717-P7170400.jpg" by roland is marked with CC0 1.0.

## Pile of books

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"Spring daffodils and books" by freestocks.org is marked with CC0 1.0.

## Pineapple

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## Pink house

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## Pipes

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## Plastic bucket: blue

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## Plate

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"Saucer with the arms of the Certon family, anonymous, c. 1768 - c. 1770" by anonymous is marked with CC0 1.0.

## Prosthetic arm

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## Sarong fabric

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## Sewing machine

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#### Singapore: One Raffles Place

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Terence Ong, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons.

#### SL coast with trees

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/c263504a-1973-b3d1-e040-e00a18061791>  
Universal Unique Identifier (UUID): d113a720-c5d2-012f-46b1-58d385a7bc34. The copyright and related rights status of this item has been reviewed by The New York Public Library, but we were unable to make a conclusive determination as to the copyright status of the item. You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use.

#### SL map (not the weird, sideways one)

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/57/Sri\\_Lankan\\_Provinces\\_and\\_districts.PNG](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/57/Sri_Lankan_Provinces_and_districts.PNG)

#### SL map (the weird, sideways one)

Deshan made this with the invaluable help of Dr. Andrew Kittle.

#### Solar panels

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Photovoltaic\\_arrays\\_at\\_the\\_Israeli\\_National\\_Solar\\_Energy\\_Center.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Photovoltaic_arrays_at_the_Israeli_National_Solar_Energy_Center.jpg)  
David Shankbone, CC BY 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons.

#### Tambourine

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BayouSS07YellowtribeTwogirlsTambourine.jpg>  
Infoplagion, New Orleans, CC BY 2.5 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/>>, via Wikimedia Commons.

#### Tamil Om: Hinduism

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Om-tamil.png>  
Anton 17, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons.

#### Tank

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#### Tardis

<https://search.openverse.engineering/image/ce6732b5-cfc4-cb0-8e23-d610b98997fd>  
"The TARDIS from Doctor Who, at Raglan Castle" by ThatRobClarke is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

#### Toys

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Toy\\_Stall\\_-\\_Durga\\_Puja\\_Festival\\_-\\_Park\\_Circus\\_Beniapukur\\_-\\_Kolkata\\_2014-10-02\\_8842.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Toy_Stall_-_Durga_Puja_Festival_-_Park_Circus_Beniapukur_-_Kolkata_2014-10-02_8842.JPG)  
Ganguly, CC BY 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons.

#### Trishaw

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bajaj\\_RE\\_4S\\_CNG\\_-\\_Three-wheeler\\_-\\_New\\_Delhi\\_2014-05-06\\_0889.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bajaj_RE_4S_CNG_-_Three-wheeler_-_New_Delhi_2014-05-06_0889.JPG)  
Biswarup Ganguly, CC BY 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons.

#### Video camera

<https://search.openverse.engineering/image/9a3d0f98-a021-40ad-beac-2bcdb2275ff>  
"Video Camera Photo" by Jakob Owens is marked with CC0 1.0.

#### White-throated kingfisher (this is the image Linnaeus used to classify the species!)

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/biodivlibrary/9492986339/>

Credit - Image courtesy of BHL. Rights - Public Domain.

#### White-throated kingfisher skull

Cropped from: <https://skullsite.com/skullpage/halcyon-smymensis-white-throated-kingfisher/>

#### Wig

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Scottish\\_Court\\_wigs\\_\(2013\).JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Scottish_Court_wigs_(2013).JPG)  
Kim Traynor. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

#### Yellow house

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/vikalpas/22576131876/in/dateposted/>

Vikalpa | Groundviews | Maatram | CPA. Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0).



# Acknowledgements

Uncle,

How?

Okay, enough chit-chat.  
Do you want to rapidly  
co-author a 32-page  
kids' book?

I want to talk about  
the protests to kids...  
It needs to be done  
ultra-fast.

I can handle the art.  
It will be weird...

Desh

**After this email on 18 April 2022, we began working on this book together.** Seven weeks later, we're exhausted, but delighted to share it with you. As you can see, it's grown from Deshan's initial 32-page folly. What you can't see is the kindness, generosity, support and critical expertise of so many people, to turn this hare-brained idea into something real.

In particular, we're very grateful to:

Ambika Satkunanathan, Helani Galpaya, Piyumi Samaraweera, Sakuntala Kadingamar, Shamara Wettimuny, Shehan Karunatilaka and Tracy Holsinger for seeing value in this book, reviewing it and helping us improve it.

Ruwanthi de Chickera for somehow finding the time to give this the really thorough edit it needed.

The artists of the April 2022 Colombo Artists' Protest, for your creations and courage (to the makers and puppeteers of the crow: our giant crow puppet was inspired by your work).

All of you sharing your knowledge and facilitating much needed conversations at the GotaGoGama library and college, in GotaGoGamas across the island, other locations and online.

The many good folk on Twitter who weighed in on Deshan's religious symbols question of 24.05.22. That conversation was invaluable.

Everyone who helped with feedback on illustrations, edits to text and translations for images, including Andre Howson, Kenolee Ranatunga, King Ratnam, Kithmi Ranatunga, Laura van Waas, Niran Anketell, Soharni Tennekoon, and Andrew Kittle. You saved us some embarrassing mistakes and made this a better book.

The Internet Archive, Stages Theatre Group and Mind Adventures Theatre Co., for hosting the book online.

Our families for being such superb fellows. Our partners – Tracy and Piyumi, for your support and kindness as we got sucked deeper into this rabbit hole of a project. Our children – Neha and Khavan; Kamil and Ayaana, for your pertinent –though often insolent– advice.

**May all your lives be rich in delicious mangos, may your brooms be fine for sweeping and flying, and may your protest chants be packed with power and wit.**


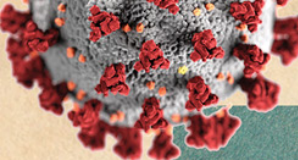


### About the creators

Amal, who wrote this book, describes Deshan Tennekoon as a smelly fellow with a very talented camera and a bad back. You can find Deshan at [www.onlinedesho.com](http://www.onlinedesho.com) and [@deshan10](https://twitter.com/deshan10) on Twitter.

Deshan, who illustrated and designed this book, deleted all the nice things Amal de Chickera wrote about himself. You can find Amal at [www.institutesi.org/about-us](http://www.institutesi.org/about-us) and [@Amal\\_deC](https://twitter.com/Amal_deC) on Twitter.







This wonderful book communicates complex and important issues in an accessible, kid-friendly manner.

— SHAMARA WETTIMUNY  
Historian

**Hello!** I'm a book for kids like you.

Let's talk about what's happening in Sri Lanka, the people's struggle, and how you can safely join in. Let's also talk about Sri Lanka's past, how we've treated each other. And our future, how we can be active citizens and build a fairer, safer, more beautiful country for us all.





'Kaputu' is a powerful book filled with important ideas. Ideas that Sri Lanka desperately needs, if it is to ever become the strong, kind, creative and prosperous nation we know it can be.


— SHEHAN KARUNATILAKA  
Author of 'Chinaman: the legend of Pradeep Mathew'

Loved it! The pictures have a vein of humour, despair and sarcasm. Great idea. Beautifully executed.

— AMBIKA SATKUNANATHAN  
Human rights advocate & former Commissioner,  
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka



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